

IN THE CLAIMS:

The text of all pending claims (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

1. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communications intermediating method for mediating communications user terminals carry out sharing at least one virtual space on a network, via an intermediating terminal, the communications intermediating method, comprising:

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

storing, in the intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in user preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in user preference based on the correspondence table;;

wherein based on a reported virtual-space identifier the user terminal ~~participate~~ participates in the virtual space and ~~initiate~~ initiates communication with at least one other user terminal having the same symbol.

2. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) An intermediating device for mediating communications among user terminals on a network, the intermediating device including:

a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols, and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

a first reception ~~means for~~ unit capable of receiving the symbol identifiers and the preference data indicating the level of similarity of preferences from the user terminals;

a ~~computing~~ calculating unit ~~computing~~ capable of calculating a level of similarity in user

preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, ~~and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in user preference based on the correspondence table;~~ and

a first transmission means ~~for unit capable of transmitting to the user terminals the virtual space identifiers that based on said correspondence table correspond to received symbol identifiers~~ a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in user preference based on the correspondence table.

3. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The intermediating device set forth in claim 2, wherein:

said correspondence table correlatively stores the virtual-space identifiers, the symbol identifiers, and interest levels in the symbols;

said first reception means ~~unit capable of receives-receiving~~ from the user terminals the symbol identifiers and the interest levels; and

said first transmission means ~~unit capable of transmits-transmitting~~ to the user terminals the virtual-space identifiers that based on said correspondence table correspond to the received symbol identifiers and to the received interest levels in combination.

4. (CANCELLED)

5. (CANCELLED)

6. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a communications program for use by user terminals on a network, the computer-readable recording medium characterized by including a program configured for:

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

a step of acquiring via a network, and selectably displaying, network resource symbols;

a step of transmitting to an intermediating device identifiers for user-selected network resource symbols;

a step of receiving identifiers for virtual spaces that correspond to symbol identifiers transmitted based on a correspondence table in the intermediating device correlatively storing in advance network resource symbols with virtual spaces;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

a step of connecting to a given virtual space based on identifiers in received virtual spaces, and initiating chat.

7. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A merchandise information exchange support method characterized by:

preparing a correspondence table in which merchandise and virtual chat spaces for exchanging information on the merchandise are correlated in advance;

storing, in an intermediating terminal, said correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table

presenting to user terminals, via a network, symbols prepared per merchandise item in order to display the merchandise identifiably;

identifying merchandise symbols selected in user terminals;

acquiring and reporting to the user terminals information for identifying virtual chat spaces correlated based on the correspondence table to given merchandise; and

enabling in a one user terminal exchange of information on the given merchandise with other user terminals to begin.

8. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communications intermediating method for mediating communications among user terminals on a network, the communications intermediating method, comprising:

storing, in an intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for

virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated; and

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table.

9. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a communications intermediating program for mediating communications among user terminals on a network, the computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a communications intermediating program for executing:

a step of selectably displaying on user terminals network resource symbols;

storing, in an intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

a step of receiving identifiers for network resources selected in response to operations on the user terminals a step of acquiring virtual-space identifiers correlated to received network resource symbol identifiers based on a correspondence table made by correlatively storing in advance symbol identifiers with identifiers for virtual spaces;

a step of transmitting the acquired virtual-space identifiers to the user terminals; and

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying the user terminal of a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbols identifier and the computed level of similarity in preferences based on the correspondence table.

10. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A communications method for use by a user terminal on a network, the communications method comprising:

acquiring network resource symbols;

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data including the level of similarity in preferences from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

receiving from the information terminal virtual-space identifiers corresponding to the symbols;

participating, based on the virtual-space identifiers, in the virtual spaces and initiating communication with other user terminals having same symbols.

11. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communications device for communicating on a network, the communications device comprising:

~~acquisition means for~~ unit capable of acquiring network resource symbols;

storing unit capable of storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

~~communication means for~~ unit capable of participating in virtual spaces on the network to carry out communications with other communications devices;

a second transmission ~~means for~~ unit capable of transmitting symbol identifiers to a predetermined information terminal enabling conversion between virtual-space identifiers and the symbol identifiers;

a second reception ~~means for~~ unit capable of receiving from the information terminal the virtual-space identifiers that correspond to the symbols;

a sending unit capable of sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal; and

~~connection means for~~ unit capable of initiating, based on the virtual-space identifiers, communication with other communications devices having the same symbols.

12. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) The communications device of claim 11, further comprising a preference table in which symbols acquired by the communications device of claim 11 and level of interest in the symbols are correlatively stored;

wherein said second transmission ~~means~~ unit transmits ~~capable of transmitting~~ to the predetermined information terminal the symbol identifiers and the level of interest.

13. (CANCELLED)

14. (CANCELLED)

15. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A merchandise presentation method cooperating with a chat system to enable exchange of messages mutually among multiple user terminals sharing virtual spaces structured on a network, the merchandise presentation method comprising:

selectably presenting to a user terminal a symbol prepared for each merchandise to identifiably display the merchandise via a network;

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

storing, in the intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table;

obtaining and sending to a user terminal an identifier of a virtual chat space, which correlates to an identifier of a symbol and then stored when receiving an identifier of a symbol reported according to user selection; and

connecting the user terminal to the virtual chat space to start to exchange messages with other user terminals.

16. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A communications support method, characterized by:

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

storing, in the intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of

similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table;

preparing for each merchandise a chat space on a network which invites users interested in relevant merchandise and a correspondence table where merchandise and a chat space corresponding said merchandise are correlatively stored;

selectably presenting to a user terminal a symbol prepared for each merchandise to identifiably display said merchandise via a network;

identifying a symbol of merchandise selected by a user terminal; and

obtaining information for identifying a virtual chat space correlated to relevant merchandise according to said correspondence table to issue a command for inviting relevant user terminal to relevant virtual chat space and starting communication between users having common interest in merchandise.

17. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A communications intermediating method, for mediating communications performed by a first user terminal and a second user terminal sharing at least one virtual space on a network, the communications intermediating method, comprising:

~~furnishing at least one network resource symbol to the first user terminal;~~

setting up in advance a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces and identifiers for symbols are correlated;

sending an acquisition request for acquiring ~~the a~~ symbol that the first user terminal has stores from the second user terminal to ~~the an~~ intermediating terminal on the network;

requesting an acquisition request for the symbol and an identifier of the symbol from the intermediating terminal to the first user terminal in response to the acquisition request from the intermediating terminal and receiving the symbol and the identifier at the intermediating terminal;

sending, from the intermediating terminal, the received symbol and symbol identifier from the first user terminal to the second user terminal;

reading out a virtual-space identifier that corresponds to the symbol identifier from the correspondence table and reporting to the first user terminal and the second user terminal by the intermediating terminal;

storing the symbol and the identifier of the symbol at the second user terminal;

wherein based on the reported virtual-space identifier the first user terminal and the

second user terminal participate in the virtual space and initiate communication with other user terminals having the same symbols.

18. (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A method of electronically communicating, comprising:
providing a symbol, received from a first electronic device that stores the symbol,
identifying a merchandise;
determining a virtual chat space identifier corresponding to said symbol; and
connecting ~~an~~ a second electronic device to said virtual chat space based on said virtual chat space identifier to allow communication regarding the merchandise.

19. (NEW) A method, comprising:
receiving, at a server, a request from a second terminal to acquire a symbol of merchandise stored by a first terminal;
retrieving, at the server, the symbol of the merchandise from the first terminal and transmitting the symbol of the merchandise to the second terminal;
reporting, to the first second and the second terminal, an identifier of a virtual chat space that corresponds to the symbol of the merchandise; and
connecting the first terminal and second terminal, which store the symbol of the merchandise, to the virtual chat space based on the reported identifier of the virtual chat space to allow communication about merchandise with other terminals.